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SOME PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN LORE.

LIKE all other readers of the Journal, I have been delighted with Dr. Hoffman's articles upon the Pennsylvania Germans. During two years of constant meeting with these people in Northampton County, and one year of acquaintance with many of them in Clinton and Centre counties, I made the collection of notes which I here present. In a few cases I repeat lore quoted by Dr. Hoffman. This has seemed best, as the counties where I have gathered are seldom referred to by him, and a restatement of the item shows the belief universal in the whole area. I would emphasize this fact,—all my material has been gathered within ten years. It is all living belief and actual custom. The bulk of these notes are from Northampton County. Such as come from Clinton County are marked (Cl.).

To begin with "signs." To stumble downstairs shows that the person is to be married; but to fall upstairs shows that the wedding will not take place for a year. To stub the left foot shows you to be unwelcome; to stub the right, the opposite. Dropped articles of course show unexpected company: a fork shows a woman; a knife, a man; dish-cloth, a slouch. To drop soap is a sign of death. To spill salt means a quarrel, but to burn the spilt salt saves the quarrel. Sneeze before you eat, company before you sleep. For two to wipe at the same towel and not twist it is the sign of a "fuss." A spider on you means a present; and to brush it off is to lose the present. The last one whose name is called by a dying person is the next to die.

To dream of falling means a disappointment in love; of a dead man, rain; of pulling teeth or a funeral, death; of snakes, enemies; of eggs, riches; of eggs and not to break them, a quarrel; of getting married, death; of high and muddy water, a funeral; of "fruit out of season, trouble without reason."

Warnings and tokens are widely believed. One lady had several tokens of coming death and disaster. One was just before the death of Louis B. She was in bed, and heard a gentle rap three times repeated. She had before heard such,—one when Mary D.'s mother was about to die. At that time she heard a thump and then a crash at the door, which was also heard by her daughter, but not by her husband, all three being in the same room. It may here be mentioned for the benefit of those who love to nurse a bit of superstition deep down in their own hearts, that this was told me one morning just after the lady had had a "token," and that before noon her brother-in-law's death took place. A family in Clinton

County has an old clock that has not run for years, but it gives "tokens." Three times it has given warning the night preceding death in the house.

Slateford is a stagnant old village, but an informant there, a very mine of folk-lore, told me that lights always hover about hidden treasure, and that several Slateford people had become *independently rich* through the assistance of such lights.

Of course the condition of the moon is of great importance in domestic and farm plans. When the moon is increasing, things grow well; hence hair should then be cut, in order to insure a thick and luxuriant growth. If the hair is cut on the first Friday of the new moon, one will never be baldheaded. Corns should be cut with a decreasing moon. "Bread rising" should be made at new moon (Cl.). When the moon is on its back, plant corn, beans, and vegetables that grow upward. When it points downward plant radishes, turnips, potatoes, etc., set posts, and spread manure. Just on this point, a friend who was a senior in college took exception to my disbelief. He wanted to know *why*, then, a board buried when the moon was on its back would not remain buried, while one buried when it points downward stays where put. He assured me that it was a fact, as he had tried the experiments. Shut up pigs for fattening at new moon (Cl.). Pick apples at full of moon to prevent their rotting (Cl.). Of course you should turn the money in your pocket when you see the new moon over your right shoulder.

Lucky days are respected. Don't begin work or move on Saturday. Boy born January 1st will not die a natural death. Put ashes into chicken pen to kill lice on *Ash Wednesday* (Cl.). Never cut toenails on Friday. Cut finger nails Friday and you will have no tooth-ache. Cut them on Sunday, you'll be ashamed before Monday. To cut an infant's finger nails makes him a thief.

To cure warts there are many remedies. Sell a wart for a penny. Open a wart and put walnut juice on. Take an onion, cut it in two, and rub each half on the wart; put them together and place them under a dripping eaves; as it decays the wart disappears. Tie a soaked grain of corn on the wart, then throw it away; as it decays the wart disappears. For curing consumption catch a black cat without a single white hair; a teaspoonful of blood from its tail will surely cure.

Cases of vicarious action or of power gained over a person by possession of something connected with him are not uncommon. Thus to kill the first snake you meet after a quarrel is to kill your enemy. To kill a toad entails bad luck, your cow will give bloody milk. To steal a dog cut off a tuft of his hair and put it in your shoe, the beast will follow you. If you get a piece of a girl's hair

without her knowledge and sew it in your coat, she will be crazy after you. In Forks Township, people take three beans and name them after three cross old women of the neighborhood, and put them into cider to make vinegar.

The belief in witches is very widespread and common. Everywhere one sees horseshoes over doors and on fences. Indeed I had the honor of acquaintance with one witch of great repute and knew two or three others by sight. My friend lived with her husband and a little grandson on the crest of Chestnut Hill, then a lovely spot. They were all kind to me, and I used often to visit them. The old man was a vine-dresser, and made wine from the fruit of his vineyard. He knew many a handy art. He was my first friend who dabbled in the divining-rod business, and he inducted me into much of the science and art of the subject. He preferred a peach twig, cut by the light of a Tuesday's new moon. "One who does not believe in her" (the divining rod) "cannot believe in God, for I call on him to make her successful, when I cuts her, and so she *must* be true," said he. His wife was a terror to the children of the neighboring town, and many were the tales I heard of her and her enchantments. Thus I learned that four men engaged her, for a round sum, "to dream a gold mine" for them. This she did. The spot was pointed out. The conditions were simple,—for three nights the men were to dig in silence. The first night of the mining, she wandered mumbling and muttering around the pit; the second night she moaned and screamed; the third she raged and yelled, calling the diggers all sorts of names until, rendered desperate, one of them ordered her to be still. "Oh, fools, your gold is gone." I am told that one of the men now says that he does not think there was ever any gold there. The old woman was not only a witch and a dreamer of dreams, but also a powwow, or witch doctor. She had a great reputation, though I never knew any of her cases. I regret that I did not learn to powwow from her; she would have taught me, and I am told that the power is best transferred crosswise from sex to sex.

A most interesting case of witchcraft which I investigated was that of Mrs. K. A neighbor of hers called my attention to the matter. We called together. Both Mrs. K. and her husband were ready to tell us of the trouble and its cure. It seems the patient, on her way home, overtook the witch by the canal side. The old woman begged a match to light her pipe. This was given, thereby giving the woman a power over Mrs. K.! Together they then walked up the hill to the house, where the witch, though not welcome, sat down on the porch to rest. The witch next asked for a drink of water, but refused to take it from the cup offered, but must have it from Mrs. K.'s bowl. After then giving Mrs. K. a cake, the witch left.

When her husband returned he found Mrs. K. sick abed, violent and abusive. Nothing could be done with her. She neglected and abused the whole household and continually grew worse. Finally the great witch doctor down the river was consulted. He gave them a charm medicine. A sheet of legal-cap paper, written full of Latin, German, and English, with pictures of the cross and the name of the divine being, was carefully folded and wrapped in a skin packet of peculiar construction. This was to be hung around the neck so as to lie upon the chest. If not immediately successful it was to be hung lower down. The remedy was a success and the woman rapidly recovered. Both man and wife told a simple straightforward story and showed me the witch doctor's charm. The neighbors all corroborate the facts regarding the disease and cure. This man went on—apparently in all honesty—to tell other bits of witchcraft in his experience. In the town "back of the mountain," where his boyhood was passed, there was a terrible witch woman, who before a street full of people, returning from church on a Sunday, turned herself into a cookstove! Again at Bethlehem, where he was a stableman for some time, his master's sister was a "witch woman." Though the doors were locked and guarded at night she would ride the horses, which would be found in the morning worn and jaded. This woman on one occasion ordered him to wring a dry towel that hung upon the barn, and, to his horror, a cupful of milk was wrung out.

A man in Clinton County, who was a senior in a State Normal School, told me the following trio of witch stories, which he firmly believed. They are samples of what are *commonly* believed. (a.) A cow became bewitched and switched her tail to knock flies from her fly-blown head. The lady owner killed her and burned her "inwards." The next day a doctor was called by a sick woman, and found that *her* inwards were burnt out. *She* was the witch. (b.) Up the river a ways a cat bothered a man, by coming to a tree-top near his window. He knew that he could kill her with only a gold or silver bullet. So he made two from buttons. The first one probably did not kill her, but the second did. In the morning the cat was found dead under the tree. The same day a man was found, shot dead with a silver bullet. (c.) Often children cry out as if in pain; groans or curious sounds, as clanking chains, etc., are heard. The witch escapes through the window, but in the morning the child is found bruised on the chest and sore, with nipples bleeding from sucking. In Schuylkill County, in barns, in the morning, *something* is seen like an animal running away. Then the cows are found dry, and the horses, wearied, hot, and dusty. Draw a picture of a toad, nail a horseshoe to the barn, and place the picture within it, saying,

“Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” and a formula ; either the bewitchment is ended, the witch revealed, or both.

The following news scrap is from the “Lock Haven Journal” of October 5, 1883 :—

A few days ago the infant daughter of Mrs. Sarah Kockert died of some ailment, probably marasmus, as the body of the child wasted away or “shriveled up,” as its parents say when they claim it was bewitched. A so-called witch doctor was called in during its illness, and he recommended various strange and peculiar methods of treatment to discover who the witch was, in order to remove the cause of the illness. Finally the name of Mrs. Snyder was given as the witch. That lady instituted legal proceedings against Mrs. Kockert, the mother of the deceased infant, for calling her the witch.

The case was heard before Justice Lung, of the eleventh ward, to-day. All the parties are respectable, well-to-do people. Mrs. Snyder swore that she had been accused of bewitching the child and causing its death. Several women testified that Mrs. Kockert’s child was sick, and it was charged that Mrs. Snyder had bewitched it. Mrs. Huntzinger testified that the infant died, and that Mrs. Kockert accused Mrs. Snyder of causing its death.

Mrs. Kockert, the defendant, testified that her child was sick, and she sent for a witch doctor, who told her that the child had been taken away by some one. She told the doctor that Mrs. Snyder had asked, “What is the witch doctor doing here?” and he replied, “When you tread on a dog’s tail he howls.”

Mrs. Kockert continued: “The doctor gave me bits of paper, and said I should put them in molasses and feed them to the child. He also gave me a strip of paper to place around the child’s breast to drive the witch away, telling me I must be careful to tie a knot in the paper. I fed some of the molasses with the papers in it to the child, but it could not eat it all. Next the doctor told me, as the child was restless, to take a briar stick and whip the cradle in which the child lay until I was so tired that I could not strike any more. Before striking the cradle I was to take a leaf off the briar whip and dry it on the stove.” Much more testimony was given of other curious methods adopted to drive off the witch and cure the child. The justice, after hearing it, decided to send the case into a higher court. — *Reading (Pa.) Cor. N. Y. Herald.*

We shall close with a reference to powwow doctors. They have great powers. For example they can stop blood flow, either present or at a distance, by repeating a mystic formula, which is accompanied

by a shudder or a cold chill in the patient (Cl.). The most successful powwow doctor, I ever met was the one "down the river" who cured Mrs. K. I am told that he is most powerful on Friday of a new moon, and that, on one such evening of the summer I called upon him, he had three hundred patients. Some go there the Thursday before and wait till Saturday, when necessary to consult him. He has "healing touch." He is an old man, looks in bad health, as if he vicariously cured all sorts of disease. He makes passes over the ailing member, and repeats mystic formulas in which the patient's name is linked with petitions to the triune God. He can make no definite charge for services; if he did they would not be efficacious. So each patient pays what he pleases, and that they are not remiss is shown by the fact that the "doctor" lives in the finest house in his neighborhood.

Frederick Starr.

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